

Billboards are an Asset to Public Safety

March 18, 2010

Madam Speaker, sometimes good things come from the darkest, most difficult moments. I rise today to share one such story.

In the summer of 2002, a promising young lady named Ali Kemp came home for the summer after her freshman year at Kansas State University. Ali had a summer job at a neighborhood pool in Leawood, but one day she didn't come home. Her father, Roger Kemp, found her body in the pump room at the pool; she had been attacked and strangled.

John Walsh of America's Most Wanted, who lost his son Adam at age six to crime, tells us that ``closure" is fleeting or non-existent. Mr. Walsh calls Roger Kemp one of his heroes. Roger Kemp--like John Walsh--has honored his child's memory by working to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

First, the Ali Kemp Foundation has sponsored self-defense training for thousands of women.

Some have put their training to use, fending off attacks. Second, Roger Kemp encouraged law enforcement to try a new idea, to display ``wanted" information on billboards. It worked in the Ali Kemp case, producing a tip that led to an arrest in 2004 and later a conviction.

Roger Kemp figured that this tactic could be broadly applied to help law enforcement. He was right. Now, billboards are a tool for police at all levels. Police in Kansas say billboards are an asset to public safety. The FBI is using donated high-tech digital billboards coast to coast, even in Times Square. U.S. Marshals report dramatic results. Lamar Advertising in Kansas has teamed up with Crime Stoppers to provide the service free of charge. Bob Fessler with the company said, ``It goes back to the old days, to Western days, when they put posters up for wanted people. It's the same concept. We hope something happens quickly."

To that analysis, I would add that effective modern ``wanted" billboards are also the legacy of a special man from Kansas who is doing his part to make Kansans safer.